

Globality in Global Textbooks: Principles and Applicability

Thesis Defence Speech

Abstract

- This study aims at exploring the issue of “globality” in global coursebooks as manifested in investing features of connectedness, avoiding inappropriacy, and preserving inclusivity. In order to do this exploration, two research methods, content analysis and the questionnaire, were adopted. The content of an example of global coursebooks, *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2003), in addition to the perception of 251 of its users at Bourguiba Institute for Living Languages in Tunis (IBLV), were investigated. The results obtained revealed that “globality”, in terms of connectedness, inappropriacy, and inclusivity is partial in *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2003) as learners’ perceptions of it do not map with the content in the coursebook. This study raises questions about the suitability of global coursebooks to globally diverse learners and reveals the necessity of taking measures in the direction of localising the content of EFL coursebooks.

Research questions

- 1. To what extent is *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2003) global?
- 2. What are the learners' perceptions of the global aspects of H/I as a global coursebook?

Methodology

- Phase I: Analysis of Content of *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2003).
- Phase II: Questionnaire with learners at IBLV Tunis.

Phase I: Content analysis

- In order to explore the extent to which the writers of the coursebook are inclusive of minorities, the numbers, the roles, and the topics related to women, men, Whites, Blacks, and other diverse characters were reported. Similarly, in order to explore the extent to which the writers of the coursebook are sensitive to the issue of inappropriacy, the following examples of issues are investigated: sex (overt mention), narcotics, isms, pork, anarchy, AIDS, Israel and six pointed stars, racism, genetic engineering, terrorism, politics, violence, alcohol, out of marriage relationships (i.e. relations with someone other than ones' spouse such as cohabitation, dating, boy/girlfriend), glorifying some dangers in some countries, religion, ideological icons, and revealing clothes. Likewise, in order to explore the extent to which the writers are investing in what connects people around the world, leisure activities, the issue of language, and global locations are explored.

Phase II: The questionnaire

- The questionnaire used is composed of two main sections. The first section of the questionnaire is general in the sense of gathering background data about the participants' gender, educational level, employment, and the kind of English they need. The second section is composed of seven questions targeting what is and what should be mentioned in the coursebook in terms of language varieties, themes, and closeness of the materials to participants' context and expectations. These questions cover learners' perceptions of the themes of connectedness, inappropriacy, and inclusivity.

The results of content analysis

- The limits of inclusivity in representation.
- The global coursebook and cultural inappropriacy.
- The global coursebook and global connectedness.

The limits of inclusivity in representation

- The attempt of writers to be inclusive was found to be partial. Women were mentioned 128 times (compared to 149 for men) and shown in diverse situations (including 11 stereotypical ones) but the problem lies in the authenticity of the image the writers drew for women at the global level.
- Racial bias was found to be characterising the representation of different races in terms of numbers, role, as well as topics. Such bias favoured Whites over the other groups (such as Blacks, Asians, Arabs, Muslims, and Native Americans). The publishers of global coursebooks are enjoying a kind of freedom in representing Men in the content. Such freedom is absent, nonetheless, with Blacks or Asians who are not depicted as thieves and alcoholic so as to possibly evade charges of racism. Nevertheless, racial bias is revealed in the limited numbers and kinds of the roles and topics assigned for non-white minorities.
- This failure could be explained by the diversity of the global audiences, which shows the impracticality of perfect representation of globally diverse people. Based on the results found in this study, it could be said that it is impractical to preserve the principle of global inclusivity of various minorities in ELT global coursebooks, which shows that the notion of “global” is vague and unrealisable.

The global coursebook and cultural inappropriacy

- Controversial topics avoided
- Controversial topics treated with caution
- Controversial topics mentioned

Controversial topics avoided

- The following issues are not mentioned: sex, narcotics, anarchy, Israel and six pointed stars, racism, genetic engineering, terrorism, isms, and pork. Due to the controversial nature of the topics mentioned earlier, publishers seem to have chosen to avoid them in H/I. Discussing these controversial issues in an ELT global coursebook could represent a source of motivation and of developing argumentation skills (Thornbury, 2002) for the kind of learners who might look at the teaching of English as an imperialistic act. Certainly, argumentation skills could be developed using other topics. But the problem is that if local audiences accept discussing these controversial topics, then, avoiding them is a non suitable decision.

Controversial topics treated with caution

- Three issues are treated with caution in H/I, which are politics (mentioned only twice and in general instances), violence (only domestic), and AIDS (once).
- In order not to lose markets, publishers prefer not to talk too much about these themes despite the fact that avoiding them prevents the coursebook from being an instrument of change and raising awareness in learners from different parts of the world society.

Controversial topics mentioned

- There are six controversial topics mentioned: alcoholic beverages (represented because it is part of target culture), Revealing clothes (shown in 8 out of 12 units) and out of marriage relationships like dating (unit 1) and cohabitation (units 2, 3, 6, 9, and 11), dealing with some dangers in particular countries (unit 4), religion, and celebrating specific ideological icons (Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, Madonna...). Through the content analysis it was possible to demonstrate that the writers of H/I showed only partial concern for avoiding “inappropriate” global issues. In fact, the state of “globality” may be unattainable, given the huge and contradicting amount of controversies that the writers need to consider.

The global coursebook and global connectedness

- Leisure activities
- The language issue
- Global connectivity

Leisure activities

- 97 different leisure activities were mentioned in H/I. The most mentioned topic among leisure activities is travel (43 times in 12 units) -> standardised hobbies, safe topic but no mention of problems of visa and segregation.
- Sport is stated 22 times in the 12 units. -> safe topic but the kinds of sport used (Golf, skiing...) are not available worldwide.
- It seems that using leisure activities as a connectedness aspect seems to be a cosmetic change that embodies, whether consciously or unconsciously, ethnocentric orientations.

The language issue

- Standard English and British everyday English dominate H/I. There were only two instances of referring to another slightly different variety, which is American English (units 3 and 4). This fact demonstrates a shortfall despite the need for a unified code. Neglect of New Englishes could deprive learners from the opportunity to benefit from intercultural information. Using New Englishes helps also in interacting with Asians and avoiding charges of ethnocentricity.

Global connectivity

- The settings in H/I are predominantly Western as 47% of the locations refer to Europe, 28% to America, and 4% to Australia. Such a dominance of Western locations could legitimate drawing the conclusion that H/I is ethnocentric as it promotes the dominance of the West and pays partial consideration to the rest of the globe (only 3% for Africa), which deprives the global coursebook from being really global.
- What is interesting concerning global connectivity is the relative importance of the mention of Asian countries (18%), which may be to show awareness of the spread of English across non native contexts. It could be also a compensation for the linguistic, numerical, and functional under representation of Asians in the coursebook.
- In order to explore the perception of the users of H/I as to the issues related to the “globality” of the coursebook, the researcher resorted to another research method, which is the questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaire

- Learners' perception of connectedness
- Learners' perception of inappropriacy
- Learners' perception of inclusivity

Learners' perception of connectedness

- Learners' perception of topics
- Learners' perception of language varieties
- Perception of the coursebook's connectedness potential

Learners' perception of topics

- 40% of the respondents replied that they prefer international topics in comparison to only 12% who reported that they prefer purely American and British topics, which shows discomfort with “ethnocentric” content in global coursebooks. Surprisingly, almost one fourth (22%) of the participants chose the alternative ‘Specific to Tunisia’, which reflects the desire of an important number of learners to learn through using content derived from their local settings. In light of this finding and as the content analysis showed that H/I is predominantly European in terms of content, it could be deduced that it does not include the type of content that 62% of the respondents would like to have. Needless to mention that the glocal content is preferred by more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the learners.

Learners' perception of language varieties

- 55% of the participants in this study claimed that the coursebook used to teach English should contain international English and not British English only (15%) or American English (2%) (see Figure 13). This finding goes in parallel with the results that concerned the topics discussed in the previous section in the sense of showing learners' tendency towards internationalisation or "globality". The same finding contradicts what exists in H/I, which was found to contain only two instances of American English and no instance of Asian varieties. Learners' preference of international English reveals that they are aware that they need a global language that goes beyond the purely British or solely American varieties. Interestingly, the content analysis of H/I did not show any instance of using Asian Englishes. Such a finding is another instance of the mismatch between the preferences of new generations of local users, explored in the questionnaire, and global coursebook's standardised and globally compromised content, as shown in the content analysis.

Perception of the coursebook's connectedness potential

- The percentage of chatting and corresponding electronically (44%) shows the important position that the internet for communication holds in the lives of the respondents. Indeed, the respondents reported that the coursebook is helpful in preparing them to be part of a global community through English, whatever the variety used is. As for its “connecting” value, the coursebook is only appreciated because it allows the users to acquire communication skills.

Learners' perception of inappropriacy

- 62% of the respondents agree when it comes to mentioning inappropriate issues (23% of them strongly) while 38% disagree (20% of them strongly). Such finding suggests that it is useless to avoid some topics for inappropriacy reasons for the target population investigated. However, there are some topics considered inappropriate by the learners.

Appropriate issues for learners

- The participants expressed that they had no objection to mentioning AIDS (82%), alcohol (62%), anarchy (68%), divorce (80%), genetic engineering (80%), narcotics (61%), politics (62%), pork (66%), racism (84%), religion (61%), stereotypes (80%), and violence (60%), which shows that they do not see these topics as inappropriate. Considering the results of content analysis, the publishers are (coincidentally) successful only concerning mentioning the issues of alcoholic beverages and divorce, as the rest of the issues identified as “appropriate” by the respondents are either totally or partially avoided in the content of H/I (see Appendix H).

Inappropriate issues for learners

- The respondents identified three themes as inappropriate, which are: Israel and six pointed stars (74% disagreed about mentioning them), out of marriage relationships (62%), and terrorism (53%). This suggests that there is a limit to learners' tolerance concerning what they perceive as inappropriate.
- Concerning “inappropriacy”, the publishers were found to be successful only with handling 4 out of the 15 explored themes. Their advice to coursebook writers to avoid alcohol, divorce, Israel and six pointed stars, and terrorism as “inappropriate” was justified judging from the results obtained in this study. However, such a low score reveals the controversy of designing global material, as the compromise that the publishers made is found to be not matching the positions taken by the particular learners investigated in this study.

Learners' perception of inclusivity

- Cultural inclusivity
- Inclusivity of learners' individual lives

Cultural inclusivity

Learners identified:

- ‘High’ cultures
- ‘Low’ cultures

‘High’ cultures

- Learners are aware of the fact that H/I presents predominantly British culture (70% of the respondents scored it ‘High’), youth culture (81%), international culture (72%), and American culture (70%). Therefore, it could be said that what the respondents identified as highly included cultures are only western cultures despite the fact that they see international culture as included. This perception shows how visible these aspects of “global culture” in the content and could reveal that learners do not distinguish between western and international cultures due to globalisation, which is based on blurring of boundaries (Guiddens, 1990; Phillipson, 1992). The content analysis discussed in Chapter Four in addition to previous literature on the issue detected the dominance of western culture in global coursebooks.

‘Low’ cultures

- The respondents identified Asian cultures (67%) and North African culture (92%) as lowly represented in H/I. The findings may provide evidence for Said's (1978) theory about the representation of low cultures by the West. Considering his claims about the ideological and imperial motives behind representing the Orient in a pejorative way in the writings of the West, it could be said that the low representation of Asian and North African cultures in H/I may not be innocent.

The inclusivity of learners' individual lives

- The results indicate that 44% of the participants reported that the closeness of the content of H/I to their situations in terms of hopes, daily life, jobs, problems, concerns, and leisure activities is medium while only 38% said it is high and 18% said it is low. Therefore, the highest rate is for learners who perceive the coursebook to be only moderately inclusive of their lives, which is the result of designing one coursebook for the entire world. Such a finding coincides with the literature on this issue as it is claimed that global coursebooks are characterised by sanitisation of content for commercial reasons (Renner, 1997; Gray, 2002; Toms, 2004).

Conclusion

- Putting into consideration all of these findings, it could be said that the notion of ‘the global coursebook’ is a commercial expression that does not necessarily mean coursebooks’ reflection of global interests and use of global contexts in the content. The implementation of the principles of investing in connectedness, avoiding inappropriacy, and preserving inclusivity were found to be hardly practical in H/I as a supposedly “global” coursebooks.

Contribution of the study

- This study could contribute to the understanding of the issues surrounding “globality” in one global coursebook through an exploration of the content in the direction of discovering its real relation with the notion of “globality”. Additionally, this study could provide insights as to the way the users of an example of a global coursebook perceive its acclaimed “globality” as an ELT globally distributed teaching material.
- The findings of this study could help the institution using H/I (IBLV) as well as other English language teaching institutions in the private sector, understand the possible match and mismatch between learners’ expectations and the content they receive. It is on the basis of this study and the like that the suitability of coursebooks could be decided.

Recommendations

- It is suggested to take one of the following administrative measures:
 - 1/ Produce locally designed coursebooks: This helps in recognising local connectedness needs, avoiding only local inappropriate issues, and being inclusive primarily of local communities for more effective learning.
 - 2/ Recommending coursebooks specifically designed for local learners from global coursebooks' major publishers: This glocalisation process is valuable for meeting the expectations of the learners, which permits effective learning to take place.
- As far as teachers are concerned the following measures are suggested:
 - 1/ Promoting teacher autonomy: This helps teachers exploit any new productive opportunity to help learners learn “better” by avoiding the fossilisation of topics and activities in coursebooks. Teachers can invest new phenomena, especially technological ones such as facebook and Twitter, as a vehicle for effective learning.
 - 2/ Training teachers to adapt coursebooks materials: Teachers may adapt the content on the basis of their knowledge of their learners and their shared cultural values. This could help them make the content as relevant and motivating as possible to the learners.

Further research

- The value of authenticity in effective learning.
- The role and the kinds of learner and teacher resistance of coursebook content.
- Writers' and publishers' views as to globality in global coursebooks.